## LESSON PLAN MUSIC AND HISTORY

We often focus our study of history on the words and deeds of major figures. Folk music is a way of drawing a portrai people swept up in the tides of history, people whose actions and thoughts might otherwise be overlooked. From slave to the ballads of workers and soldiers, folk songs exist for every era of American history. For exam, This Land is Your Lan helps us to better understand the outlook of American citizens who had lived through the Great Depres:

Song-writer Woody Guthrie was born in 1912 in a frontier town in Oklahoma which he described as "one of the singie square dancingest, drinkingest, yellingest, preachingest, walkingest, talkingest, laughingest, cryingest, shootingest, shootingest, walkingest, talkingest, laughingest, cryingest, shootingest, walkingest, walkingest, because the second s

fightingest, bleedingest, gamblingest, gun, club and razor carryingest of ranch towns and farm towns, because it blossomed out into one of our f Oil Boom Towns ." <sup>1</sup> In the 1930's, the citizens of the Panhandle states we afflicted by both the Great Depression and the "Dust Bowl" drought. Guthri left Oklahoma and traveled West as part of a huge migration. During the often desperate travels, he forged strong bonds and felt great compassion his fellow travelers, swept up in one of the United States' most bleak econor periods. After moving to New York City in 1939, he met the musician Alar Lomax, who encouraged him to record his songs and stories for the Library of Congress. In 1940, RCA records released Guthrie's "Dust Bowl Ballads." In his songs, Guthrie documented the feelings and experiences of the displaced the outcast

By then, the United States had been drawn into World War II. Patriot feeling was strong, as the country united against the Axis powers. According to lo Guthrie grew tired of hearing Irving Berlin's God Bless Amer on the radio, feeling it sugar-coated America's injustices and inequalities. He wrc This Lanc is Your Lanlin 1940 as a musical alternative to more straightforward patriot fervor. As is often the case in folk music, the melody was not original: Guthr adapted it from a Gospel song The World's on Fi. Guthrie recorded This Land is

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	This land is your hand, this land is my land	
	Sum the California to the States scland,	
	signe the comprises to the charter solarise,	
	from the Reduced Toutet, to the July statem wellers,	
	los blued america for me.	
	As I sout andhing that ribber of highway	
	and and about not that eviders sugaranty.	
	and any below as the place maky, I said:	
	and the read of the young surray, a week	
	Get bisent america for me,	
	A	
	I reared and rambles, and followed my footsteps	
	To the sparkling ands of her diamond deserts,	
	and all assund me, a soice was sounding	
	get bloud andrica for sur	
	1.44.L	
	das a by high more that lived to stor me	
V	a sign and minted said : Private Property.	
	Participation and participation of the second participatio	
	But on the back side it didn't any nothing -	
	get bloost america for me.	
	Ister the our court aliming, they I was stulling	
	De adeat fielde enving, and dust clouds rolling;	
	The voice was chanting as the fog new lifting :	
	get blassed annerica for me.	
	One bright survey surving the the abastra of the start	
	By the Rillef office & she my perpete - /	
	a day of the start of the start of the start of the	
	at they stort hungy, a start these acousting if	
	God bland availas for me.	
	*	
	all you see write is	
	of what you are.	
	atter and an an	
1	Mary G_	
	1.4, R.4, R.4, R.4.	
	A Set. 20, 1940	
	todoty be	tiel.
	Manones How	-
	Manaple Hou	-

original lyrics for This Land Is Your Lan

Your Lanlmany times, often changing the words to make them more or less overtly political. Guthrie's song celebrated v he felt were essentials of American life: freedom, fairness and equal opportunity. Incorporating a discussion of this so a way of creating a more nuanced study of United States during one of the decisive periods of its his

## Class Lesson:

Sing This Land is Your Larlwith your class or play a recording
Discuss the lyrics with your class. What are Guthrie's words trying to express
What inequalities existed in the United States at that time? How did the World War impact such social injustices segregation, women's rights and the plight of the po

## Further Study:

Guthrie's extensive output creates a vivid and lively depiction of Depression era America. The official Woody Guthı web-site includes a Teacher's curriculum, showing how Guthrie's songs may be used to teach art, science, math and m (<u>http://www.woodyguthrie.org/curriculum/curriculumkubasak.hm</u>) Guthrie's work is archived at the American Folk Life Center of the Library of Congress. The Center may be accessed on-line at <u>http://www.loc.gov/folklife/</u>.

Other representative examples of folk songs that might accompany lessons in American history include the followir Revolution war soldier is courted in "Soldier, Soldier, Will You Marry Me?" (Sound file may be found at: <u>http://www.</u> <u>mcneilmusic.com/rev.html</u> A prospector sings of his fruitless search for gold during the Gold Rush in "Acres of Clams (Score and lyrics may be found at <u>http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiOLDSETLR;ttROSINBOW.htm</u>]) Conferedate soldiers complain of rationing in "Goober Peas." (Lyrics and sound file may be found a <u>http://www.niehs.</u> <u>nih.gov/kids/lyrics/gooberp.htm</u>)

<sup>1</sup> From the official Woody Guthrie web-site: http://www.woddyguthrie.or